

Evolutions in communication begin with small steps

When Lindberg and Humphreys describe the library of 2015, they note a continuation of the movement currently seen toward greater availability and accessibility of electronic information:

Our future library's "virtual" collection—the set of electronic information it makes available—is much vaster than the physical collection owned and housed in library space. By 2015, many publications are issued only in electronic form, thousands of back runs of journals have now been digitized, and electronic copies of books, manuscripts, and images abound. [1]

Lindberg and Humphreys also forecast "a mix of payment and publication models" that should keep information costs low. These ideas of ubiquitous information and access to information are currently embodied in the open access movement. Despite libraries' reservations about the pricing models and sustainability of some open access publishers, in many ways, open access is a wholly self-evident proposition for libraries. The Medical Library Association (MLA), in addition to most libraries, has long been a vocal supporter of the movement. The full text of the *Journal of the Medical Library Association (JMLA)* has been immediately available via PubMed Central since 2001, and its entire archive can be accessed through the site. Though open access journals do not come without significant concerns about peer review and the long-term viability of the proposition, the idea of freely accessible information, particularly research information for use in the health sciences, is an undeniable good.

The particulars of embargoes, funding, and other logistics aside, what open access ultimately promotes is the free distribution and fostering of ideas and communication. Among the editorial team's goals for the *JMLA* are to explore such newer means of communication—particularly electronic com-

munication—and to promote librarians' efforts to experiment and innovate in the communication arena. The key role of libraries is to communicate and disseminate information and learning, and a key vehicle for doing so, particularly in the health sciences, is the scientific journal. As technology increasingly permeates science and communication, the idea of the journal is evolving.

We have likely all seen speculation about the gradual diminution of the journal and journal article as the central artifact of scientific and scholarly communication [2]. As electronic repositories and portals gradually develop means to ensure quality peer review and the accuracy and authority of content, where does that leave the scholarly journal? Lindberg and Humphreys see journals remaining important in 2015, with individual articles leading independent "electronic lives" via globally accessible information repositories. We believe that health sciences libraries, always innovators, are ideally situated to take a significant role in contributing to these kinds of changes in scientific communication and fostering the incorporation of augmented communication strategies into the stream of scientific discourse. Not only do we, as librarians, actively seek technological advances to promote health information provision, we respect and value the history and continuing utility of the print medium.

We are attempting to explore technology-aided changes with the *JMLA*, while enhancing the print version, by evolving the journal's format and typical procedures to take advantage of new communication opportunities. To that end, readers will see more and more content appearing exclusively in the online edition of the *JMLA* (a process that began with the April 2006 online only symposium/focus issue). This is both to facilitate the reading of some data-intensive ar-

ticles, as space considerations in the print *JMLA* typically disallow the inclusion of more than five to eight tables or figures, and to allow the *JMLA* to disseminate more information, in a more timely manner than the quarterly print format sometimes allows. Of course, cost considerations are also an issue: as an example, the 142-page print version of the April 2006 *JMLA* cost more than \$20,000 to produce and mail, while the 109-page online only supplement published that same month cost less than \$4,000.

Additionally, readers will see new features such as prepublication e-prints and special articles, such as the "Case Studies," that invite online reader commentary and promote communication and knowledge-sharing in the profession. Given the power of the electronic journal to enable communication and dissemination of ideas in this interactive fashion, we increasingly view the print version of the journal as a "teaser," the breadcrumb to lead readers to the electronic version. Clearly, the electronic version receives substantially more exposure [3]. Submissions from all parts of the globe continue to rise, and we are confident that that also means that the information and ideas contained in the journal find an increasingly wider scope and audience.

This is all very interesting, you may say, but what does it mean for me as a reader (and we hope, contributor) to the *JMLA*? First, we hope that you support our drive to assume an influential role in experimenting with and demonstrating how the evolving scholarly journal can impact communication. We also ask that *JMLA* contributors work to eliminate the distinction, in their own minds as well as those of university and hospital administrators, that online articles somehow do not "count" in the way that print journal articles do. Indeed, recent research demonstrates that online articles receive greater, more lasting exposure and an increased

number of citations [4]. Of course, we are fully aware of the exigencies of tenure and the publish-or-perish paradigm and will always work with authors to find the best outlet for their submissions.

Lindberg and Humphreys close their vision for the library of 2015 by noting that predictions about technology and libraries are notoriously wide of the mark. While the print health sciences journal and current communication practices may continue long into the future, Lindberg's and Humphreys' call for library leaders to seize opportunities to improve health care, research, and education is directly on target.

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